

The First Link  
of a Broken Chain

# Nana

A Short Story

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David Atta

The following tale is a work of  
fiction.

While drawing on actual people,  
places and incidents, their use does not  
claim complete accuracy of said people,  
places, and incidents and how they  
relate to real world events.

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## **Dedication**

This is book 1 of a series of 4.

The series is dedicated to every person who has lost a life, a loved one, a hope or a dream in Nigeria.

It is dedicated to those who work against impossible odds to make Nigeria great again.

To countless, fallen soldiers and the families they left behind.

To the victims and survivors of every bomb that went off in a food market, bus station, or shopping mall.

Together we will overcome these troubles and repair our broken links.

Together we will put back the things that fell apart.

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Chapter 1:

# Chibok

Nana's eyes blinked open; it was pitch black at midnight in the girl's hostel. The power supply, bad as it was all over Nigeria was even worse in the rural northeast and there hadn't been a wink of light all night. A cool breeze wafted in through the large, glass-less windows; rusted iron bars were welded over them to keep burglars out, but were helpless against mosquitos, for that Nana had been given a net to drape over her 3 feet by 6 feet bed.

Nana Gambo had come to Chibok two days earlier to write the senior secondary school exams. Her town had a secondary school, but so few girls attended school in the area that when major exams like this came around, they were grouped together to write them in a central examination center. This year Chibok Government Secondary School had

been chosen and Nana had made the 128km journey from her school in Maiduguri to take part. She and several other girls were squeezed into the dormitories alongside the regular students, a fee had been paid and in exchange temporary beds, beddings and cutlery had been provided. Now, 8 hours to the start of the exams, she tossed and turned, partly nervous about Physics, her first paper, and partly excited that finally she was on a course that might lead her out of the cycle of hopelessness and poverty that was life in the northeast for a young girl.

Her parents had argued back and forth about it for days. Her father had demanded that she forget about the exams, get married as most young girls did and go start a family; her mother had argued back, insisting that the past 6years of going to school would be a waste if Nana didn't write the university qualification exams. In the end a truce had been reached; if she passed, she could apply for a state scholarship to go to university, if she failed, she would get married. Either

way her father would no longer be investing his personal resources in Nana's education.

As Nana drifted back to sleep, she was fully aware that in her search for a future that offered any hope, she was on her own.

Nana woke up with a start. She checked the time on her small, blue Nokia, it read 3.56am. She was still wondering what it was that had woken her up when she heard the muffled sound of shouts and gunshots. Nana rushed out of the sleeping net; everyone knew that gunshots in the dead of night meant only one thing: a Bokoharam attack. She put on her rubber sandals as all around her other girls stirred and came out of their sleeping nets. They all stood sheepishly, waiting for the hostel matron or someone else in authority to come and tell them what to do. Suddenly a machine gun went off just outside their window, sending all the girls scattering all over the room in a shrieking mass of pandemonium and fear. Nana was swept up in the confusion and

was pushed across the room to her right, she found herself in a heap beside a large cupboard close to the door, her parent's faces flashed before her. Her mother sad and crying, her father with a look that said I-told-you-so; at that moment Nana determined that no matter what, she would survive, she would not let her mother or her dreams down, she would find a way out of this.

She tried to survey the room, tried to find some way of escape in the darkness. The windows were not an option, the bars were too closely spaced even for her skinny frame, the door was the only way out of the room, she looked at it for a second, then turned back to the room: total mayhem. The girls were shrieking and running round in circles, Nana decided quickly and was making her way to the door, still crouching when it burst open and four dark shapes swept past her, so close that the swishing robes of the last of them brushed her face. They flashed torches round the room, barking at the girls to quiet them and fired

shots at the ceiling. They all had their backs turned towards Nana, none of them had noticed her and she didn't wait to see what they would do; she slipped out of the door undetected and ran down the corridor that led out of the hostel.

The chaos outside equaled that in the hostel but was more brutal. Groups of men with guns roamed the school grounds, shooting randomly at the walls of the school buildings and killing the school animals, she counted 4 dead goats (she had fed them the previous day) and they had set the two school buses on fire, happily she saw no dead human bodies. Nana crouched beside a tree, waiting for a chance to make a dash across the school yard and to the gate. For a moment she wondered where all the teachers were, she had not seen a single adult; a sudden burst of gunfire snatched her back to the present and she focused again on escaping unhurt; if she could just get out of the compound then maybe she could escape. She was about to make a run for it when the sound of a horn or

siren of some kind blasted into the night, drowning out the shrieks, shouts, and gunfire. Nana was still wondering what it meant when, as if on cue, groups of girls were brought out of each hostel building, led by 4 or 5 terrorists each. The girls were herded to the center of the compound and made to sit down on the ground. Nana was half distracted by the unfolding spectacle; she had heard stories of mass murders of students by these terrorists. The Buni-Yadi Secondary School massacre flashed in her mind; 59 schoolboys had been killed in one night, their throats slit as they slept, just because they had defied the terrorist's orders that no one should attend western styled schools. The realization dawned on her that she might be about to witness another mass killing, the thought churned her stomach and reminded her of her need to flee, but as she turned away from the cluster of shivering, terrified girls she came face to face with the scariest person she had ever seen.

The man was not much taller than Nana. He was fair-skinned and curly-haired like the Chadians who sometimes came to her village to buy fish caught from the Lake. His face was blank and expressionless, his right eye was missing, but his remaining left eye seemed to weep evil and depravity. Looking into this single eye, Nana had the distinct impression that this man had no limit to his malevolence. Before she should react, fight, or run, the One-eyed man hit her across her face very hard, knocking her to her knees. He then grabbed her by her hair and dragged her to join the other girls in the group.

He pushed her to the ground roughly then turned to the nearest terrorist and barked out something in a strange language. The effect his words had on the other terrorists made it clear he was in charge. Within a minute a group of young boys had been brought forward and given a machine-gun each. The One-eyed man then began picking girls at random, he would point at a girl and she would be pulled out from the group

and taken to stand against the wall of a nearby building. In a few minutes 8 girls had been taken from the group and stood-up against the wall. Nana was still wondering what their fate would be when her eye caught a twinkle to her right, she turned and saw the single eye of the man looking straight at her, for a second, they held each other's gazes then he pointed at her and turned away. Immediately rough hands grabbed her and pulled her from the group, her protests were as futile as her struggle; they placed her with the other girls against the wall and stood back.

Nana must have been in shock; she wasn't as scared as she thought she should be. She knew they were being lined up to be shot; probably by the young boys with the machine-guns; probably as some sort of initiation, or as part of their indoctrination to become terrorists themselves. She should have been petrified, collapsing in fear, but she was calm. She calmly recalled her mother and aunt discussing a story of how young boys kidnapped by

Bokoharam were turned into terrorists by feeding them drugs and making them do terrible things. Some were made to kill their friends, others their family members. Those who hesitated were themselves killed by those who didn't. It was a terrible situation to be thrust into and as Nana leaned against the wall fear was not on her mind. There was regret that her journey to freedom had been cut off before it even began, but there was also pity; pity for the innocent boy who would be turned into a monster by her death.

The sound of the One-eyed man's strange language brought Nana out of her reverie. She looked up and saw him addressing the group of 9 young boys; he would speak quickly in harsh, guttural tones and another terrorist would interpret, but too quiet for Nana to overhear.

Finally, the boys were marched forward and each was assigned to a different girl. Nana was paired with a young boy who couldn't be more than 14 years old. He wore a red muffler and

looked as scared as she was, dropping his machine-gun out of fear and receiving a vicious blow across the back of his head as a reward. Nana closed her eyes, shutting out the whimpers and shrieks from the other girls on either side of her, and waited.

Nana waited; and waited; and waited some more. Finally, she opened her eyes, wondering what the delay was about. All the boys were turned away from the girls; they were all looking at the One-eyed man who was talking on a phone or radio of some kind. He spoke on for a few seconds then ended the call, placing the large phone or radio into a satchel on his hip, then he barked out more orders, gesturing at the girls, both the ones seated on the ground and Nana's group by the wall.

All the girls were rounded up and taken to the school gate, they were made to sit down and wait while some of the terrorists along with the One-eyed man left in a jeep that they must have come with. After about 2 hours, 5 buses

came rolling into the school compound and parked near the group of girls, they were driven by the terrorists who had left earlier, but the One-eyed man did not return with them. All the girls were loaded onto the buses in 5 different groups and, at about 4.30am they were taken away from Chibok Government Secondary School; all 279 of them.

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Chapter 2:

# The Roadblock

The bus Nana was in was the 4<sup>th</sup> in the convoy. The girls were packed as tight as sardines, not according to the seats, but squeezed into every space, in layers; some below the seats, some in the seats, some above those in the seats. In this way, the bus, which normally would take just 18 people, was successfully loaded with over 40 girls plus 8 terrorists. Amongst the terrorists in her bus was the boy with the red muffler. Their eyes met as she was loaded onto the bus and Nana noted something that might pass for guilt, but she didn't care. He was as much a pawn in this game as she was. She didn't know whether to be glad that she had been spared or worried that some darker fate awaited her and her mates. The One-eyed man was heartless, of that she had no doubt; whoever it was who

had called him away could not be expected to be kind.

Nana was packed close to a window by the door; she adjusted herself till she could see the road, hoping to catch sight of any passerby or soldier she could signal to for help. There was a state-of-emergency in the area, declared by the federal government and ratified by parliament in Abuja, a sort of military rule where soldiers were empowered to take over all security. It had not escaped her mind that no soldiers had shown up at the school despite the shooting, which must have carried for miles in the dead of night. Perhaps they would run into a roadblock; that would be their salvation. 5 buses couldn't possibly pass through the town without being stopped and searched. Nana strained her neck trying to see the road ahead of the bus, but the angle she was sitting at made it impossible, she could only see what was happening on the road beside the bus, not ahead.

Suddenly an image flashed across her field of view; 4 or 5 tires stacked in a pile, a metal drum with a fire

burning in it and 2 dark figures, both dressed in military uniform and holding guns, one of them waving the bus on. They had just passed a roadblock and the soldiers had let the bus through.

Any hopes of soldiers coming to their rescue disappeared with that roadblock. Nana had heard stories of soldiers conniving with the terrorists; of military commanders supplying terrorists with weapons and intelligence, but she had assumed it was just that, stories. Nana shut her eyes again and waited again for a fate she seemed unable to avoid.

After about 15minutes, Nana felt the bus slow down, she looked out of the window again and thought she could see the glow of another fire just ahead of her line of sight, just ahead of the bus. Could they be at another roadblock? She heard voices talking; the voices got louder like they were arguing. Someone shouted something she couldn't understand, and then gunfire broke out. The bus surged forward suddenly but didn't go far before it veered off the road and ran into a

ditch on the side. Everyone was thrown against everyone and there were screams of pain from everywhere, Nana, however, was miraculously freed up by the sudden reshuffle, she also found herself now directly behind the little terrorist with the red muffler. The terrorist closest to the door opened it; he was a burly, bearded beast of a man; he jumped out, machinegun in hand, shouted at his comrades to follow then slammed the door shut, locking it after all 8 terrorists had extricated themselves from the bus, leaving the girls in a tangled mass.

Nana immediately tried to open the door but found that the door handle had been ripped out. She didn't know how the large man had opened the door, but it was impossible for her to open. The frustration brought tears to her eyes. She leaned back and cried to the heavens beseeching every god she knew and some she had only heard of. Outside, the shouting continued, and gunfire raged.

Nana suddenly noticed there were two small figures just outside the bus, standing by the door. She looked closer and saw that one of them was wearing a red muffler; he was with another boy who was just as young. Nana realized that they had been left to guard the bus as they were not ready to fight yet.

Without thinking, hoping against hope, Nana knocked on the window. The other boy almost jumped out of his skin with fright, but the boy with the red muffler turned around quickly and he and Nana were eyeball to eyeball, separated by the thin, dirty glass of the bus window. Nana beseeched him without words. Her gaze told him that he owed her; that if not for providence, he would be her murderer. She begged for a break, for a chance, just one, no more.

The boy paused for a long moment, then, inexplicably, he unlocked the door, using a key that hung from a cord around his neck. He glanced at the other boy who stood as still as a tree,

as dumbfounded as Nana, then he pulled the door open and stepped aside. Nana needed no prompting, she stepped out of the bus into the cool half-darkness of pre-dawn; she had little time to weigh her options. To her right, a light suddenly flashed, blinding her briefly; it was the 5<sup>th</sup> bus coming up towards them, Nana instinctively moved to her left, away from the newcomers and towards the front of her own bus where the shouts and sounds of sporadic gunfire were coming from.

As she passed the boy their eyes met again, it was a silent moment of camaraderie and gratitude; a moment where they both savored this small act of rebellion against the terrible fate that had been thrust upon them both. Without a word Nana wished him good fortunes and received the same, then she slipped away cautiously away, towards the front of the bus.

Nana crept forward, hunched down close to the body of the bus, both to conceal herself and to avoid catching any of the flying bullets. She inched

up to the front passenger window on her side and took in the scene before her. The driver of her bus was spread-eagled across the steering wheel and dashboard, the jagged holes in the windscreen in front of him told her he had been killed in the gunfight. A burst of gunfire and a flash of light made Nana jump; a few meters ahead of her, lying flat on the ground, Nana made out the figure of the big terrorist, he was shouting curses in Kanuri and shooting at someone across the road. Nana followed his gunfire peering into the darkness on the other side, it was still dark, and her vision was impaired, but she could make out a lone figure shooting back. On the road itself, she counted six immobile figures; soldier or terrorist she could not say, but she knew she had to get away from here quickly.

Nana moved quietly forward, stumbling, and stubbing her feet as she tried to walk forward while looking back and sideways to make sure she hadn't been discovered. The gunfire and shouting suddenly increased as the

terrorists from the newly arrived 5<sup>th</sup> bus joined the fight, Nana noticed also that the gun flashes from the lone shooter across the road were moving further and further back and were less frequent, as though whoever her rescuer was in retreat. Nana quickened her pace.

She had covered about 20meters when she heard a shout behind her, she turned round and saw the big terrorist running towards her, waving his gun about his head, and shouting at her to stop. Nana turned and ran, with all her strength, as fast as she had ever run before. But she barely took 5 steps before a massive fist crashed into her back, sending her sprawling forward and onto the ground.

Nana lay there, on her back, dazed. She was dizzy in a funny way and she felt the sensation of something warm crawling down the side of her head. She touched her face, and her hand came away red. She had struck her head on a rock as she fell; her vision started to turn dark at the edges.

Suddenly the huge shape of the terrorist came into her view. He was shouting at her, but Nana couldn't make out the words, her brain was shutting down. The large man struggled with his gun, cocked it, and pointed it at her threateningly, he shouted some more, but Nana could not respond and remained silent. The man stopped shouting; he shouldered the gun, aimed it at her head and spread his legs in a relaxed pose. Nana closed her eyes.

CRACK!

Nana wondered if he had missed, she had felt nothing. She opened her eyes and saw the big man collapsed on the ground beside her, his face twisted in an ugly look of surprise; an ugly wound in the side of his neck was weeping blood.

He was still alive, clutching at his neck, gasping for breath, and breathing out froths of blood from his mouth and nostrils. Then his struggling slowed, his gasping stopped, and his eyes fixed

on something in the distance that  
wasn't there.

Nana, mercifully, passed out.

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Chapter 3:

# Shelter

Slowly, Nana drifted back to consciousness. She lay on a straw mat on the floor of a clean but sparsely furnished room. For a moment she forgot her ordeal of the past few hours, but the throbbing in her head opened a window in her mind and the memories rushed through. She whipped her head to the side to see if the dead terrorist still lay beside her, the jab of pain from the act almost knocked her out again and she let out a sharp cry.

Immediately, the door cracked open, and a little boy peeped in, he saw she was awake and left again without a word. A few seconds later the door opened wide, and a woman stepped in. She was tall and slender as most women from northeast Nigeria are. She carried a tray with a small bowl of *fura da*

*nunu*, a native meal of curdled cow milk and boiled millet balls.

Nana tried to sit up, but the woman stopped her.

"Rest my dear." She said in Hausa, laying a hand on Nana's shoulder and gently pushing her back into a reclining position. "Where am I?" asked Nana, still wary, but warming to the woman's obvious kindness.

"This is my home, and this is my son, Ahmed." She said, gesturing to the little boy who had peeped in earlier. "My name is Fatima" She placed the tray of food on the floor bedside Nana and, kneeling, leaned over to check the dressing on Nana's head. Nana subjected herself to Fatima's inspection. Wondering how she had passed out next to a dead killer and woken up in the home of this kind woman. "How did I get here?" She asked. "We found you on our way to the farm; we saw the bodies of the terrorists and guessed what had happened. Sometimes the soldiers are good; they killed seven of the Bokoharam people." Fatima leaned back,

after satisfying herself that her wounds were improving.

Ahmed stood behind his mother, sneaking shy peeks at Nana when she wasn't looking.

"We thought you were dead at first, but my cousin, Shehu, checked and found you were alive. He carried you here."

Fatima finished speaking and an easy silence fell over both of them.

Nana marveled at her good fortune; from the execution that was called off, to her escape from the bus to the big terrorist failing to kill her. She relived the horror of the past few hours, the scale of it all overwhelmed her and she started to cry.

Fatima leaned in and held her in a gentle embrace, rocking her softly and soothing her with calming words.

Over the next half hour Nana recounted her ordeal to Fatima, leaving out no detail. Fatima listened attentively, horrified by her suffering, but sincerely thankful that she had survived and escaped.

"Allah must have a plan for you, to have protected you from so many

dangers. My husband travelled to Maiduguri, but the phone lines have been deactivated all over the state to prevent the terrorists from communicating, otherwise, I would have called him, and asked him to go to your house and tell your parents that you're safe." She lifted the bowl of food off the tray and handed it to Nana with a small wooden spoon. "There is a curfew in this area because the terrorists have been very active of recent and also the elections are this Saturday, so we cannot travel, but once it is safe, I will ask Shehu to take you home. Until then you are welcome to stay here as long as you want." Nana thanked her and ate her food silently, the fact that she faced the very real prospect of returning home to her parents, alive and well, seemed unreal; just a few, short hours earlier it had seemed completely impossible. "Did any of my school mates escape?" Nana asked. She had been so focused on fleeing the terrorists that she had not looked back or tried to help anyone else escape. In the safety of this room with so much kindness being shown to her, she felt a

stab of guilt. Fatima replied gently. "No, my child, we only saw you and 7 dead terrorists." She picked up the tray and bowl when Nana finished eating and left her to rest. Nana soon fell asleep. Nana was in the kitchen helping Fatima make lunch. Her wound had healed almost completely over the past 2 weeks. It was a Friday and Fatima's husband still hadn't returned from his trip, the phone lines were still down and travelling home to Maiduguri was still impossible. Fatima seemed unperturbed about her husband's delayed return, apparently it was not uncommon, or so she claimed. To Nana the worst part was the total lack of communication, her parents would surely be convinced she was dead or at the very least been abducted by terrorists. She longed more than anything to get home. Her dreams of going to university had died the night the terrorists struck, but still she missed home, especially her mother, but also her father. Rigid and stubborn, they disagreed on almost all things, but she knew he loved her and his insistence on his old ways was because he did not

understand or trust the new. The sound of a happy shout broke through Nana's thoughts, she crossed the kitchen to the door; opening it, she saw a tall man in the living-room, lifting an ecstatic Ahmed, tossing him in the air and catching him again. Fatima stood beside them smiling. The man turned around and seeing Nana he smiled kindly.

"Is this the young lady you told me about?" He asked as he stood Ahmed on the floor, the child promptly collapsed in a heap. "Yes, replied Fatima. She was in Chibok." The man looked at her for a few seconds, a serious look coming over his face. "The government is denying that the school was attacked or that any girls were kidnapped, although everybody in Maiduguri knows it's true. The whole incident is making them look bad, so they are trying to make it disappear; they don't want anyone talking about it."

"How did the news spread to Maiduguri? I thought the phone lines were disconnected?" Fatima still gripped her husband's traveling bag, a silent embargo on any further travel.

He seemed to notice and smiled tenderly at her.

"All the phone lines were disconnected, but there is movement within Maiduguri itself, so news still spreads from house to house and mouth to mouth. The external exam-monitors who went to Chibok the following day for the exams were the first to spread the news that the girls were missing. The teachers and parents had reported to the police in Chibok, but nothing was done. But the news is filtering out and now there is a lot of protesting going on, especially in Abuja and the southern parts of the country to see the girls rescued. There is a group that meets in Abuja every day, they call themselves 'Bring-Back-Our-Girls', they are really trying. But the government itself isn't doing anything."

He turned to Nana again.

"Thanks be to Allah you escaped."

Nana was speechless, how could the government be so irresponsible? How could anyone be so callous as to try to cover up the kidnap of over 200 children?

Her thoughts must have shown on her face.

"Don't worry, Nana; the important thing is that you are safe. There are many people fighting for your school mates to be rescued. Nothing that Bokoharam has done before has caused as much public outrage as this, not even when they killed those boys at the Buni-Yadi school.

I came with a soldier friend of mine; he helped me get through the checkpoints. There is still a restriction on travel to or from Maiduguri, but I'm sure he can help take you back home to your parents. He is going back the day after tomorrow."

Nana couldn't help but smile. Her eyes lit up at the first bit of good news she'd heard in ages. "He's still outside, let me go and tell him." Fatima's husband said, and he went out the door, swiftly followed by Fatima, still clutching his travelling bag and a toddling Ahmed.

Nana was left alone in the living room, lightheaded and as happy as she'd been for a long time.

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Chapter 4:

# Brigadier Orubebe

Sunday had taken too long to arrive.

It was the day she would be returning to Maiduguri and the preceding Saturday had seemed at a point to be made of rubber, how it had stretched. But Sunday had finally arrived, and Nana was going home.

After an enthusiastic goodbye to Fatima, Shehu and Ahmed, Fatima's husband had driven her to the army base close to their home, he had introduced her to a young army officer, Lieutenant Hassan, who was a long-time friend, and, at about 8.30am, Nana began the journey home.

Nana sat at the back of the camouflaged, 4x4, Toyota pick-up truck.

Lieutenant Hassan drove and another soldier sat beside him up front, apparently, he was also going to Maiduguri.

They had driven for about 30minutes, the two soldiers conversing about trivial things like sports scores and serious things like how the war with the terrorists was going, gradually, the conversation turned to her.

"Your friend is very quiet." The soldier said to Lieutenant Hassan.

"She has been stranded in Chibok for about two weeks because of the ban on travel; a friend of mine asked me to help him take her to her home in Maiduguri."

"How are you *yarinya*?" The soldier asked, addressing Nana this time, and turning around in his seat to get a better look at her. "I am Second-Lieutenant Adewunmi." Nana replied curtly that she was fine; she was not in a talkative mood, besides, she still remembered the soldiers who had helped her abductors, she wasn't yet ready to be too trusting.

He turned his attention back to his colleague. He was about to say

something else when a chirping sound interrupted him, it was the 2-way communications radio installed in all military vehicles. Second-Lieutenant Adewunmi answered it and talked for a few seconds with someone who was obviously his superior. After a few seconds he cut the call and turned to Lieutenant Hassan.

"That was Brigadier Orubebe, he wants us to pick him up on our way; he's going to Maiduguri as well."

A slight frown crossed Lieutenant Hassan's face.

"Where is he?"

"Along the road, up ahead, his jeep broke down. Overheated or something."

Lieutenant Hassan spoke to Nana.

"Erm... Nana, we have to pick up my boss. We're usually not allowed to carry civilians, but I'm sure he won't mind when I tell him what happened, don't worry you'll still get home today."

"Okay." Nana replied.

After driving on for another 20 minutes or so, they came to the broken-down military jeep. Lieutenant Hassan

parked the truck and turned off the engine.

"Don't worry." He said to Nana. "Everything will be fine."

She smiled awkwardly and sat still as he and Second Lieutenant Adewunmi got down from the truck, another soldier had come out of the broken-down jeep and they hurried to meet him.

Nana couldn't see his face, but his uniform was different, it had bits and pieces of color on the chest and his collar was a deeper shade of green, she concluded that he was the Brigadier Orubebe. They spoke for a few moments; he seemed upset about something, after a few more moments Lieutenant Hassan came back to the truck. "My boss wants to talk to you." He said. Nana suddenly felt uneasy. Hassan was avoiding eye contact. "Why?" she asked. Hassan opened the back door and stepped aside for Nana to get down.

"He will tell you himself."

His friendliness had gone, Nana sensed she wouldn't get any more information from him, so she got down and walked to the Brigadier.

He was a tall man, dark complexioned with shifty eyes.

Nana took note of how smartly dressed he was, almost as if he was a model for the army and not a soldier. Lieutenant Hassan and most of the other soldiers she had met were also neatly dressed, but they at least they looked battle toughened, the Brigadier, on the other hand, looked brand new, untouched. Nana had the impression he was a pretender, who had probably not seen real battle.

"Young lady, why are you travelling in an official military vehicle? Are you a soldier?" He asked gruffly.

Nana was thrown totally off balance. She searched for a reply but found none.

"We discourage our soldiers from fraternizing with the local girls, but how can they resist when you people insist on forcing yourselves on them?"

Nana's head was swimming, she struggled for an answer. "I'm sorry sir. I was in Chibok when it was attacked, I was kidnapped but I escaped, a woman there helped me, it was her husband who took me to Lieutenant Hassan and asked him to help

him take me home to my parents in Maiduguri..." Nana stopped talking; she noticed he was looking at her in a strange way. "Did you say Chibok?" He asked slowly. "You were kidnapped from Chibok?"

Nana didn't answer, his reaction made her wonder if she had made a mistake by mentioning Chibok, she remembered Fatima's husband saying the government was trying to discredit the kidnapping incident.

The Brigadier turned to Lieutenant Hassan.

"Lieutenant, this girl is a witness to a terrorist crime; we know Bokoharam has civilian collaborators, and the so-called missing schoolgirls are suspected of staging the entire kidnapping incidence to discredit Mr. President and the good name of the Nigerian Army. I am taking her to Defense HQ immediately for interrogation."

He turned to Nana.

"How did you manage to escape from the terrorists when, as you claim, over 200 other girls were taken successfully?"

Nana wasn't quite sure if she was hearing everything the Lieutenant was saying correctly. "Sir...I..."

"Keep quiet; we will get all the information we need from you in Abuja. You're probably a Bokoharam spy, trying to gather Intel from naïve soldiers."

He cast a glance at Lieutenant Hassan as he said this. "I will take your vehicle; you wait here with mine, and make sure my driver has it returned to base safely."

He turned to Nana.

"Young lady, come with me."

Exactly 2 hours later Nana found herself seated in a holding-room of the Nigerian Air force Base in Gombe, the Lieutenant had ordered Second Lieutenant Adewunmi to drive them, he had sat in the front while Nana sat in the back. He had not let Nana out of his sight for a single second since they had arrived at the base; taking her to the holding-room himself and locking her in with his own hand, only when she was safely confined had he left.

She had sat; waiting alone for about 30 minutes, scared out of her wits and

thoroughly confused at her sudden reversal of fortunes. She was the victim here, a survivor of kidnap and two attempts at murder, and the very people she had been taught would protect her were doing the opposite. She placed her head in her hands and cried, sobbing softly until she heard the door open.

"This is the prisoner." Announced the Brigadier proudly, as he stepped into the room. Nana looked up and saw him saunter in followed by another officer, this one dressed in the blue of the Nigerian Air Force.

"I captured her myself, trying to compromise 2 young and very inexperienced soldiers. She had already tricked them into giving her a ride from Chibok to Maiduguri; no doubt she was leading them into a Bokoharam ambush. She also claims she was a part of the Chibok kidnapping, and that she escaped. I need to move her to DHQ for interrogation immediately."

The officer in blue closed the door and looked at Nana appraisingly for a moment.

"Mr. President would've been incredibly pleased with this a week ago; those Bring-Back-our-Girls people are giving him a very tough time. They've publicized the incident so much, there's no country that hasn't condemned it officially. Nobody's dared blame Mr. President directly yet, but the implication is that the military is either incompetent or complicit. This is late? We needed a girl like this before the elections, to prove the whole matter was a set-up, not now that we have lost."

"The elections were rigged." Brigadier Orubebe replied hotly.

"Under-aged voters all over the north; and the Southwest states only want government oil-contracts so they allied with the opposition, but we're appealing the results, it will be reversed. The handover date is 2 months away, anything can happen in that time. Bringing this girl to light now will help to discredit those BBOG troublemakers and soften the people's minds towards a reversal of the election results at the Supreme Court."

"True, very true." Said the Air force man, stroking his chin.

"That's why I need you to get me to Abuja before 4pm. There's a press-briefing by the Chief of Defense Staff; we need to get the girl to him before he addresses the press. This kind of catch." He gestured at Nana. "Will revitalize Mr. President's followers and redirect the focus from the military to the civilian locals who aid the terrorists."

The officer in blue fidgeted.

"Getting the girl to Abuja in time isn't a problem, there's a plane due to depart in about 45minutes, the problem's the process. I must declare all passengers and their purpose; once I enter her name and her details into the manifest, she'll certainly be red-flagged and processed to military intelligence, those guys answer to the National Security Adviser and you know he doesn't play ball. He'll want to verify everything, maybe even talk to the girl himself. You'll miss the press briefing."

"Then don't declare us."

"No way." Said the officer in blue. "If my bosses find out that I cleared undeclared passengers for transport that'll mean big trouble for me."

"What is wrong with you?" The Brigadier countered.

"Who's a bigger boss than the Chief of Defense Staff, or even Mr. President? The ruling party needs this situation to be resolved; under no circumstance can power be handed over to the opposition. The plan is to have the election results reversed, by any means necessary. If this is properly done, we're looking at big rewards. I guarantee that if you get me and the girl to the CDS before the press-briefing you won't spend another week in this godforsaken desert town. Abuja is better suited to you, though Lagos is possible."

There was a moment of indecision.

"You can guarantee I'll be posted out of here? You can guarantee an Abuja or Lagos posting?"

The Brigadier smiled shrewdly.

"How do you think I became the youngest Brigadier in the army?"

The officer in blue took all of four seconds to decide.

"Where is your luggage? There's another plane boarding, it leaves in 10 minutes."

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Chapter 5:

4p.m.

And so, Nana, after being hustled onto a military plane, found herself airborne and bound for Abuja the capital city of Nigeria.

At this point she was past caring what her fate would be. Good fortune had intervened too many times over the past 2 weeks for her to expect any more lucky breaks. She found herself drifting, subconsciously to the relaxed state of mind that she had found herself in when the boy with the red muffler had pointed his gun at her. That memory made her wonder where the little boy terrorist was now. Had he

been caught for helping her escape? Had he been killed? Or was he now a full-blown terrorist, having passed some other initiation somewhere else, after having carried out some other gory act.

Nana looked up and saw Brigadier Orubebe chatting with another passenger, a soldier. She wondered what other kind of corruption was being sold and for what price. The discussion in the holding-room had numbed her to her core; she was nothing more than a little pawn in a big and complex game of power and politics. She had no illusions of a happy ending; she would most likely disappear after the press-briefing, like many others before her.

She closed her eyes again and tried to sleep.

The plane landed at the Abuja Air Force Base at 15minutes past 2pm. The Brigadier grabbed Nana roughly by the arm and led her off the plane and out towards the officer's car park. He breezed through all the checks-points; no one paid any attention to Nana, they all seemed to know him personally and

were more interested in the gifts of cash he shared freely with them.

Finally, they got to his car, a Nissan Murano SUV. He opened the passenger side door, let her in and locked it, then he crossed to the driver's side and got in. He started the car and was about to reverse out of his spot when the car radio came on, a newscaster was speaking.

*"This is Breaking News. The President has conceded defeat to his opponent and offered every assistance to ensure a hitch-free transition of power. This will mark the first time that an incumbent Nigerian President will surrender power to an opposition challenger and accolades are pouring in from all over the world. Some have even called for him to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.*

*A transition committee will be inaugurated next Monday to be headed by the Vice-President while the President and his family will proceed on a short vacation to his home state*

Sources say the President's decision to concede defeat and hand over power is not unrelated to ongoing and growing protests that have erupted nationwide, and indeed globally, following the kidnap of over 200 schoolgirls from their school in Chibok, Borno State.

World leaders have extended their congratulations to the President-Elect, pledging their support as he begins the arduous task of rebuilding a broken economy and a corruption-riddled military. Indeed, while addressing a press-conference a few moment's ago to confirm the President's concession, he reiterated his pledge to root out corrupt military officers who have allowed the Boko Haram problem fester either by incompetent service or outright complicity.

We will bring you more in our detailed news bulletin at 4p.m."

Nana heard, but didn't quite understand; was she in more trouble? Was this good news or bad news?

She turned to the Brigadier and got the biggest shock.

He was unbuttoning his uniform at high speed with one hand and undoing his belt with the other. He looked at her suddenly, as though she was a nuisance that he had forgotten about, he turned off the central lock which he had engaged earlier and, leaning across her, opened the passenger door.

"Get out."

Nana obeyed before she understood the command, Brigadier Orubebe leaned over again and slammed the car door shut.

She stood still for a few moments, in shock as she watched him take off his uniform and put on a T-shirt and a pair of some sort of black trousers. She was still standing there, rooted to the spot when he zoomed out of the carpark.

Nana was still standing in the car park; there was a sudden rise in activity in and around the car park itself and the adjoining buildings and she assumed it must be connected to the President's concession.

She walked towards the nearest building but stopped when she saw the intimidating military guards, she returned to the car park, at a loss for what to do when a military transport

truck pulled in. She watched as it stopped and 4 soldiers got off, followed by a solitary female soldier who was in handcuffs.

Nana stared, captivated by the sight, suddenly, the soldier looked her way and their eyes met. Nana turned away quickly, afraid of getting into more trouble. She walked out of the carpark towards the main road and just stood there, wondering what to do. After about 10 minutes a gentle voice called out to her.

Nana turned slowly and saw another female soldier walking towards her.

"Are you lost?" the soldier asked in Hausa.

Nana didn't answer. Her trust levels were at subzero levels, especially for anyone in a military uniform.

The soldier seemed to sense her apprehension. "That soldier they just brought in handcuffs, she said she knows you, she said she helped you escape from terrorists in Chibok town. Is it true?" Nana was rooted. Could it be?

Nana replied in perfect English. "There was a soldier that helped me

escape when terrorists kidnapped me from my school. She was alone and they were almost 20. She killed 7 of them."

The soldier smiled. "She asked me to take you to a meeting in town where they can help you. Have you heard of 'Bring-Back-Our-Girls'?"

Nana's eyes lit up at the name of the now familiar group.

"Let me take you to meet them. They meet every day in the city by 4p.m., they're the best people to help if you want to find your way home."

Nana's stance softened, she didn't have any relative or friend anywhere outside Borno, so she was well and utterly lost and alone in Abuja, and this 'Bring-Back-Our-Girls' group felt familiar to her by now. They seemed the only reason why the government had failed to bury her and 200 other lost girls, she also remembered the anger with which the corrupt Brigadier and his corrupt colleague had spoken of them, and this, more than anything else helped her decide.

Nana walked towards the soldier and followed her to her car.

It was 5 minutes to 4pm when Nana and Nnoye (that was the soldier's name) got to the meeting venue. It was a humble setting; white plastic chairs gathered around a few straw mats spread on a green lawn, a simple scene that contrasted sharply with the surrounding opulence. They were flanked on either side by magnificent buildings; one, a hotel, was the biggest and most beautiful building Nana had ever seen. It was clear to Nana that these people had brought their protest to the heart of the city, where it would be loudest.

There was a woman speaking on a microphone, loudspeakers amplifying her voice. People drove by in big cars, some slowed to listen, some parked and came to join, and others sped along with scarcely a sideward glance. Nana listened to her and other speakers talk for almost an hour about her and her school mates; they spoke of how they would never abandon them, even if the government did. It warmed Nana's heart to hear them.

After a while Nnoye took Nana forward to meet the first woman who had spoken. She wore glasses and a red scarf,

everybody at the meeting seemed to be wearing something red. The woman had a stern look about her, but when she saw Nana, she smiled a mother's smile.

Nana walked up to her impulsively and held her tight, and then she wept. The woman seemed to understand, she didn't say a word, she just held Nana and let her cry. Nnoye stood back a bit watching them.

Most of the group was aware that something unusual was happening by now, but no one interfered; but another woman walked up to them, she was a bit taller and wore a striking red *hijab*.

After a while, the woman in glasses pulled away from Nana, she bent low so that she and Nana were at eye-level. "My name is Aunty Oby." Then she pointed to the woman in the red *hijab*, who was now standing just by them.

"And this is Aunty Aisha. What is your name?"

Nana told her, still shaking involuntarily from her weeping. The soldier stepped forward and started talking to Oby, Aisha and the other group leaders. Nana tried to follow their conversation but was abruptly

distracted by something she could scarcely believe.

Seated at the far end of the group, about 20meters away, was a small huddle of people. Nana left Nnoye and Oby and started walking towards them.

Her eyes had seen many things over the past weeks, Nana didn't know if she could still trust them, so she walked closer; she was about 5meters away when one of the people spoke and Nana stopped dead in her tracks, then she raced to the one who had spoken and flung herself at him, almost knocking him over, clinging to him as tightly as she'd ever done. Here, in the middle of nowhere, as far away from home as she could be, Nana had found her father.

Mr. Gambo wriggled round in his daughter's grip, which was tight as a vice, when he saw who was holding him, he screamed, burst into tears, and fell to his knees, and father and daughter embraced long and hard and cried together.

By now the entire group had gathered round them, silently watching the tearful reunion of father and daughter.

Nana apologized for insisting on going for the exams; he dismissed the apology, saying all he wanted was to have her back and that Allah had granted his wish, besides, he didn't think so lowly of educated women anymore. Oby and Aisha were both educated, and without them the protests to get the Chibok girls back would have died long ago.

Oby, Aisha and Nnoye pushed their way to the front, all three women crying freely; the news filtered through the crowd that one of the Chibok Girls had found her way to Abuja and been miraculously reunited with her father who himself had travelled down to Abuja from Maiduguri as part of a delegation of parents of the missing girls that had been invited to join the Abuja protests.

Nana suddenly remembered her mother. "Where is Mama?"

"She is at home with your brother; we take turns coming for the protests so that someone can stay at home. She came last week; this week was my turn."

"Baba!" Said Nana, suddenly feeling thoroughly exhausted.

"Let's go home."

And for once, father and daughter were in complete agreement.

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